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ABSTRACT

This study reports the results of a year-long curriculum evaluation involving a university research office, lay committees, and a district faculty in an atmosphere highly charged with controversy. Studies were made of a number of components of the school, and a comprehensive community survey of attitudes was conducted. An analysis of the attitudes uncovered, the interest groups involved, and the effect on the school program was made. Though major value differences remained, a salutary outcome of the evaluation study was the development of a factual base for discussion among the contending parties, and the reduction of stereotypes. (Author)

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Traditional Vs. Emergent Values:

A Curriculum Evaluation in an Expanding Suburban Community

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INTRODUCTION

Publicly supported educational programs have traditionally been a product of compromise and conciliation among competing interest groups. From time to time one or more interest groups have challenged the current program and attempted to displace a value system and impose their viewpoints on the local schools. These ideological conflicts have focused on different targets: textbooks, a course of study, a curriculum approach, a teacher, and even the general goals of education. Some authorities (Cremin, 1961) believe these conflicts simply mirror the viewpoints manifest in the larger social context. Others (Spindler, 1962) believe they reflect a struggle for dominance between competing value patterns which Spindler (1962) labelled traditional and emergent values.

This study documents the clash of traditional and emergent values in a changing school system. It explores a number of the dimensions of the conflict among competing groups and the effect of the conflict on educational practice. Westville, the focal community in this study, represents a microcosm of the nationally publicized controversies surrounding textbooks, types of curriculum, and general educational goals.

Once located on the periphery of a large metropolitan area, Westville, due to increased accessibility via a major expressway and available land, has been plunged into a residential and commercial building boom which has subjected it to a major population

change. Located in one of the major population areas of the United States, Westville has changed in the last ten years from a predominately rural population to a suburban one, a pattern which has become increasingly common in the United States (Zikmund, 1975). With the influx of new residents, this small, politically conservative community has been transformed into a relatively larger suburb where residents hold divergent views on both educational philosophy and specific curriculum practice.

For the past 5 years, Westville has been struggling with conflicting claims regarding curriculum. The school board and the community has been divided regarding curriculum approaches, open classrooms, adoption of textbooks, and the general philosophical direction that education should follow in the community. With the failure of the voters to ratify school bond issues and the increasing dissatisfaction of the community concerning curriculum a group of parents and community residents in cooperation with the school board initiated an evaluation of the school curriculum and district policies. Because of the very strong competing and divergent viewpoints in the community, the school board decided to enlist outside consultants to aid in the evaluation of the school system. The authors, under the auspices of the Office of Evaluation Research (OER) University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, served for one year as consultants to the lay study and conducted a separate evaluation of the school district.[1]

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[1]Dr. Harriet Talmage also served as a consultant to the lay study and worked extensively with parents and community residents. Valerie Sparkis assisted in the evaluation of the school district.

This paper is concerned with the curriculum evaluations conducted by OER and the lay citizens' committee of Westville.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the OER evaluation were threefold:

1) to examine and document the competing values in the various community groups;
2) to determine areas of agreement and disagreement among community residents and examine how these shape the school program and affect school policy;
3) to formulate plans to enhance school-community relations, reduce the level of conflict, and improve the educational opportunities for all students.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Before any community consensus regarding school policy and programs could be sought, it was important to determine the goals, educational philosophy, and attitudes toward the school system of community residents. To obtain this information, a mail survey was conducted by the citizen public relations committee (a sub-committee of the lay citizens' committee formed for the purpose of enhancing school-community relations). The survey questionnaire, written by the sub-committee, included a number of statements to be rated on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree regarding general educational philosophy, school goals, school programs and policies, physical facilities, school-citizen communication, and

taxes.[2] The residents were asked to indicate what they were most satisfied with and least satisfied with at Westville schools. Respondents were asked for baseline data on age, length of residence in the community and whether they had children in the schools. A total of 1,750 questionnaires were mailed, one to every household in the community. Of these 355 were returned and analyzed, representing a 20% sample of the total population. Checked against the baseline data, the 20% sample was found to adequately reflect the total population and the dominant opinion group of the community. Questionnaire responses were analyzed by age of the respondent, length of respondent's residence in the community and whether or not the respondent had children enrolled in the school system. Chi squares were calculated to determine significant differences.

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[2]Sample items for each of these categories are:

Educational philosophy: Children should be allowed to progress in their studies at a rate consistent with their abilities.

School goals: Westville schools should teach children to support the values and standards they learn in their homes.

School Programs and Policies: Westville schools have adequate textbooks and resource materials.

Physical Facilities: The physical facilities are satisfactory at Lincoln School.

School-Citizen Communication: I get sufficient information about Westville school affairs in general.

Taxes: Westville schools receive enough tax money to provide adequate educational services.

Additional questionnaire items are available upon request.

In order to examine differences and similarities among parents, citizens, teachers, and school administrators regarding their views on the purpose of education and the ways in which schools should attain educational goals; 36 parent/citizens (all members of the lay citizens' committee), 35 teachers, and 2 administrators were asked to rank 106 educational goals. (Hoepfner, et. al., 1972). Using factor analysis, 34 goals were selected to best summarize the responses and eliminate redundancies, and t-tests were performed to determine significant differences. The citizen responses could not be analyzed by length of residence, age, etc. because the committee requested complete anonymity of all goal ranking responses.

Finally, members of the lay citizens' committee conducted formal classroom visitations with OER staff members to each class in the Westville district in order to observe curriculum implementation and classroom procedures. In addition, many committee members visited nearby school district classrooms in order to compare these programs with those of Westville.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the comparisons between respondents with and without children, and of varying ages and lengths of residence in the community. Where applicable, significant differences illustrating emergent and traditional value differences (discussed elsewhere in this paper) are noted: in all other cases positive and negative attitudes are noted.

Respondents with children currently attending Westville schools

perceived school programs and policies considerably more favorably than did respondents without children in the schools (see Table 1). Those respondents who did not have children at Westville rated the school board (not shown in Table 1), the physical facilities, and the adequacy of tax money significantly higher. Generally these respondents favored the return to more traditional curriculum practices and did not favor providing additional monies to the district for education.

Since a greater number of residents with children at Westville schools have lived in the district a relatively short time responses were analyzed according to the length of time the respondent has lived in the community. Three groups were examined: 1) residents for 0-5 years, 2) residents for 5-10 years, and 3) residents for 10 years and more. The 5-10 year residents perceived the school system considerably more favorably than did both the 10+ year residents and the 0-5 year residents (see Table 1). The 0-5 year residents rated many school policy and program items higher than did the 10+ residents. Finally, responses from different age groups varied considerably. On the whole, 30-45 years-of-age respondents rated the school system higher than did respondents under 30 and over 60.

In examining the differing responses among age groups, length of residence, and whether the respondent has children in Westville schools, it soon becomes apparent that the two types of value systems that Spindler labels traditional and emergent are being expressed. Spindler defines traditional values as those which emphasize "...thrift, self-denial, delay of satisfactions to the future, (and a belief that there will be one), strong emphasis on success and a belief that the means to it

is hard work, a belief in absolute morals and elevation of the individual as an end rather than the group." (Spindler, 1962, p. 6) These traditional values underlie the responses of the 10+ year residents, and those without children in the Westville school system. Prevalent among residents living in the rural environment of the Westville of ten years ago, these traditional values now are in direct conflict with the emergent values that have been characteristic of the newer residents. Emergent values emphasize "...sociability, sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others, a relativistic attitude toward moral norms, a present-time orientation that reflects uncertainty about the future.." (Spindler, 1962, p. 6).

Spindler comments that these conflicting values promote many of the current attacks on present educational systems. Westville school policies, like many school districts today, more closely approach the emergent typology than the traditional typology. This is seen most clearly when parent/citizen, teacher and administrator educational goal rankings are examined.

The parent/citizen group as a whole ranked highest academic skills and their relationship to everyday life, while teachers stressed creative, affective and artistic goals. However, both the parent/citizen and teacher groups felt the child's self-esteem and knowledge of sociology and citizenship is most important and religion least important as school concerns.

The fact that there are some areas of agreement encouraged the Westville community in their effort to reach agreement at a level of practice verses a level of theory on educational practices. To

reduce the ideological level of discussion, parents and citizens were further urged by OER, teachers and administrators to visit the schools and systematically observe them. Before and during the evaluation, rumors in the community concerning educational practices were a persistent problem for the schools. Once citizens began visiting the schools, many of the negative issues previously raised regarding the school were found to be grossly exaggerated and in some cases non-existent. In addition, several of the more emergent-value oriented citizens visited schools outside the district which would serve as a comparison sample. Through classroom observations and subsequent informal meetings with Westville teachers, the citizens found that while emergent-value oriented practices including open classrooms, were said by administrators to be implemented by Westville staff, the majority of teachers were emphasizing rather traditional-oriented values of hard work, personal success, and the importance of the individual. These observations were confirmed by OER staff observations using a generally accepted rating instrument which measures openness in classroom practice (Walberg and Thomas, 1974). On a scale of 1 to 4, 4 representing strong evidence of open classroom practices and 1 representing no evidence of openness, Westville classrooms were rated a mean score of 2.5 or less on instruction, diagnosis, provisioning, humaneness, seeking, and self-perception. Only on two dimensions did Westville classrooms even approach open classroom practices, and then only slightly: for evaluation, a mean score of 2.6 and for assumptions a mean score of 2.7.

Students were administered standardized tests as one aspect of OER's evaluation. The fact that the mean standardized achievement scores were at grade level for all grades and considerably above grade level for the majority of grades reassured citizens that students were getting a quality education. In their classroom observations and comparisons with other systems citizens did find some weak points in the Westville system. As citizens became more knowledgeable about Westville policies specifically and educational practice generally, ideological judgments diminished and empirical data-based judgments came to the fore. Most citizens of both traditional and emergent value orientations became more receptive to judging specific educational practices as effective or ineffective rather than those which squared with their own ideological sets. Thus, the actions of citizens moved from general criticism of the entire school system to documented suggestions for improvement of specific areas of the Westville school system. Among these suggestions were: to send home children's work regularly so that parents can observe their children's progress on a continuing basis; administer standardized tests yearly; develop curriculum guides in all subject areas to provide for continuity and better organization; systematically plan for the allocation of funds for purchase of instructional materials; improve the physical facilities of one Westville school; establish guidelines to make discipline practices and procedures consistent throughout the district; improve methods of communicating with citizens by regularly circulating newsletters including school

financial status reports, discussion of important issues, information regarding curriculum programs, notification of public meetings, and opinions of school board members, teachers, and citizens; and increase efforts to promote wider community participation in school affairs, including promoting visits and building tours for non-parents, community use of school buildings for social, recreation, and other purposes, and participation in school programs. The OER team made several similar recommendations in their own, independent report to the school board.

CONCLUSIONS

The problems and conflicts concerning the Westville school system prior to the undertaking of the lay citizen and OER evaluations, reflected a situation which Spindler accurately described:

> "I believe that many of the conflicts between school boards and educational personnel, between parents and teachers, and between teachers and pupils can be seen as projections of differences in value commitments that represent various approximations to the traditional and emergent positions..." (Spindler, 1962, p.22)

Differences of opinion regarding Westville reflected differences of opinion in the community as a whole. Because the school system has been moving toward individualized instruction and other non-traditional curriculum programs, the older residents tended to be

dissatisfied with the school system, while the newer, more progressive residents encouraged the general thrust.

Citizens and OER concluded that relations among all residents could be enhanced if the school system introduced better information and communication channels, promoted wider community participation in school affairs, sponsored visits for non-parents, and promoted community use of the schools' facilities for social and recreational purposes. The objective data obtained through the year-long lay citizen and OER studies served to reduce the stereotypes held by the competing groups and sharpened the focus on the genuine needs of the schools. As empirical data were gathered that described and documented classroom practice it soon became evident to all but the most hardened ideologists that the earlier assumptions were too broad, often did not correspond with facts, and were untenable as a basis for making policy. Ideological rhetoric was reduced, the climate for teaching and learning was enhanced, and a better relationship with a more informed community resulted. Obtaining objective data regarding the schools halted a good deal of the previously-existing conflict among citizens, the school board, and educational personnel, and separated the school issue from the larger, overriding issue of value conflicts. Those who clung to an extreme conservative position on traditional values were increasingly isolated and their influence diminished as the study progressed. Basically, OER observed seven major direct results from the lay and OER studies.

1. Greater community interest resulting in a larger turnout in school board elections;
2. More careful selection of school board members, and attempt

by candidates for the board to inform the community of their stand on specific issues;

3. Increased positive community interest in the schools and a readiness to contribute to as well as critique school activities;
4. Better informed citizens who demanded increased communication with school administrators and teachers, and more systematic organization of school curriculum;
5. Increased demand for accountability of school administrators regarding curriculum, student achievement and finances to both citizens and teachers;
6. Reduction of antagonism among teachers and citizens on the purpose and organization of classroom instruction;
7. The establishing of a citizens' advisory committee to work directly with the school board which would be a source of input of citizen opinion.

In reducing conflict in the Westville school system through the use of systematic evaluations the role of the OER evaluators were twofold: 1) getting citizens involved in their own evaluation of the school system; and 2) providing data independent of the lay citizens' committee.

Involving citizens in an evaluation provided the community with the ability to systematically study the school situation. Thus discussion which was previously dominated by emotional arguments, reflecting the clash between traditional and emergent values of the community, were focused into rational dialogue based on factual data. Citizen awareness that OER also was preparing an independent evaluation

report ensured to a great extent concern for reliability in the citizen report. Since OER stated that all recommendations it made would be based on empirical data, the citizens' committee was forced to also rely on empirical data, so that their suggestions would be received with equal weight. As stated previously, it is interesting to note that while the lay committee and OER gathered much of their data separately, on the whole, the suggestions of both committees were similar. In fact, in many cases, the OER evaluation was more critical and called for more extensive changes than did the citizens' report. A new school board received the two reports and incorporated them into their planning. Where previous decision making had been conducted in an atmosphere of extreme tension between those who espoused traditional and emergent values, the new data base provided by the evaluations removed the heated rhetoric and introduced specific options into the forum of discussion.

Westville's citizenry found that educational programs are multidimensional and do not, upon empirical study, lend themselves to easy judgments based on global value stances. Facing evaluation data is a humbling experience for the neatness of abstract philosophy and soon gives way to the complexity inherent in school practice. However those who refused to face the facts as it contradicted their ideology either publicly withdrew or lost credibility. They were no longer able to publicly intimidate and shape policy through broad slogans. Most curriculum evaluators should find this result reassuring.

TABLE 1. Examination of Patterns of Significantly Different Attitudes and Value Orientations Between Groups

	General Educational Philosophy	School Goals	School Programs and Policies	Physical Facilities	School-Parent Communication	Sufficient Taxes
Children at Westville						
Yes	E	E	+	E, N	+	-
No	T	T	-	T, N	-	+
Length of Residence						
0-5 years	E	E	- and +	E, -	N	M
5-10 years	E	M	+	M, N	N	-
10+ years	T	T	-	T, +	N	+
Age						
Under 30	N	N	-	T, -	-	-
30 - 45	N	N	+	M, +	+	M
46 - 60	N	N	+	E, M	M	M
60+	N	N	- and +	M, +	M	+

NOTE: E = emergent values
T = traditional values
M = neither E nor T, + nor -
+ = positive
- = negative
N = no significant difference

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